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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1975, three alternative secondary schools in the Federation of Alternative Schools, with the help of the Minneapolis Public Schools' Research and Evaluation Department, surveyed their students. The 66-item questionnaire, which was developed to provide an overall assessment of student attitudes and information for program improvement, was completed by more than 75 percent of the students enrolled in the three schools. Results showed that more than 80 percent of the respondents indicated that their alternative school was relevant; 90 percent said their teachers understood them, liked them, were fair to them, and showed an interest in them; the majority were satisfied with how much they were learning and they learned more this year than previously; and the majority felt their school helped them in cognitive and affective learning areas. Seventeen of the items were included in a 1972 survey. 1975 students responded more favorably on all items, but several interpretation cautions were noted. If positive attitudes toward school can serve as a means to school effectiveness, alternative schools appear to have some potential for effecting the attainment of other student educational outcomes. (RC)

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Minneapolis Public Schools

School-Related Attitudes of Students Attending Secondary Alternative Schools

Lary Johnson

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October 1975

C-75-45

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School-Related Attitudes of Students Attending Secondary Alternative Schools

Summary

Do students like school? Do they feel that they are learning? How do students view their teachers and their classes?

In the spring of 1975, three alternative secondary schools in the Federation of Alternative Schools, with the help of the Minneapolis Public Schools' Research and Evaluation Department, surveyed their students. The 66-item questionnaire, which was developed to provide an overall assessment of student attitudes and information for program improvement, was completed by more than three-fourths of the students enrolled in the three schools.

- More than 80% of the responding students felt that their alternative school taught them the things they wanted to learn, that most schoolwork would be useful to them, and that their classes applied to the world they knew.
- Ninety percent of the respondents felt that their teachers understood them, were fair to them, liked them, and showed an interest in them. Two-thirds said they would feel comfortable sharing personal concerns with their teachers.
- The majority of the students said that they were satisfied with how much they were learning and that they thought they learned more this year than in previous years.
- About one-fourth of the students said their school helped "a lot" and half said their school helped "some" in the following areas: improving reading, math, and writing skills; developing skills useful in different jobs; increasing awareness of different careers.
- About 40-50% of the students said their alternative school helped them "a lot" and another 40-50% said their school helped them "some" in these areas: learning to get along with others, improving self-understanding, improving decision-making skills.

Seventeen of the questionnaire items were included in a survey conducted in Minneapolis senior high schools in May 1972. The alternative school students in 1975 responded more favorably than did the public school students in 1972 on all items. Several interpretation cautions, such as the three-year difference between the survey administrations, were noted.

Several important questions were not addressed by this study. For example, what effect do alternative schools have on their students' feelings about themselves? Do alternative schools have an impact on their students' academic skills and their eventual success in, and satisfaction with, the adult world?

Before any conclusions can be made about the effectiveness of the Federation of Alternative Schools, further research is necessary. However, if positive attitudes toward school can serve as a means to the end, alternative schools appear to have some potential for effecting the attainment of other student educational outcomes.

October 1975 Research and Evaluation Department

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Minneapolis Public Schools

School-Related Attitudes of Students Attending Secondary Alternative Schools

Do students like School? Do they feel that they are learning? How do students view their teachers and their classes? Do they see themselves as capable learners? Student attitudes toward school is a popular topic in education. Ralph Tyler (1973) has stated that "...affective behavior is not only important as means to education but also as ends." If students like the school they attend, it seems reasonable that their chances of success in school performance areas will be greater than if they felt the school environment were unpleasant. Affective behavioral outcomes for students, such as positive feelings about themselves and other people, have been cited frequently by educators and lay people alike.

Do students who attend alternative schools have positive school-related attitudes? Johnson and Faunce (1972a) surveyed attitudes of senior high students attending non-public alternative schools in Minneapolis. Compared with perceptions of their previous school, alternative schools were viewed by the students as providing more positive and closer relationships with staff and other students, courses that were more interesting and easier to understand, more student input and freedom, more relevant curriculum, and more opportunities to improve basic skills.

Assessment of affective student outcomes has continued at four secondary alternative schools in Minneapolis - The City Inc., the Center School, Loring-Nicollet, Northside Street Academy - with assistance from the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS)' Research and Evaluation Department. These schools formed the Federation of Alternative Schools to obtain joint funding and resource support from MPS to supplement their private and social-agency funding sources. The Minneapolis school system provided more than $60,000 in instructional support and materials during the 1974-75 school year. Federation schools serve students who have not been able to, or have not wanted to, function in public secondary schools. Many of the students are deficient in basic academic skills.

Staff members from the Federation of Alternative Schools and the MPS Research and Evaluation Department developed a 66-item questionnaire that measured student attitudes toward any specified school.[1] Federation staff members felt that information from the questionnaire would provide an overall assessment of student

[1]The work of Gail Brisbin (The City, Inc.), Mike Moschogianis (then Northside Street Academy), and Joe Musich (Loring-Nicollet) was indispensable to the conduct of this study.

attitudes and data for program improvement. Some of the items were taken from the Student Opinion Questionnaire, an instrument developed by and used in the Minneapolis school system. The items were grouped in the following categories using subjective judgment of similar content and previous statistical studies: curriculum relevance, general liking of school, student-teacher relationships, instructional quality, student input, individual freedom and responsibility, individuality of learning experiences, peer relationships, general progress in learning and specific progress in learning.

Seventy-eight percent of the total group of students attending three of the alternative schools in the Federation completed the attitude survey in the spring of 1975; 52% of the students who were enrolled at The City, 80% of the students at Loring-Nicollet, and 98% of the students at the Northside Street Academy. Results for Loring-Nicollet, and particularly The City, should be interpreted with caution since surveys were not returned by a substantial proportion of the enrolled students. It is not known to what extent the responses of students who did not complete questionnaires would have differed from the responses of students who completed questionnaires.

Results

The following statements are based on the data presented in Table 1 on pages 3-5 (School A is The City, School B is Loring-Nicollet, and School C is the Northside Street Academy).

Curriculum relevance (items 1-6). More than 80% of the responding students felt that their alternative school taught them the things they wanted to learn, that most schoolwork would be useful to them, and that their classes applied to the world they knew. About two-thirds of the students said that they were learning a lot of things that would help them earn a living.

General liking of school (items 7-12). Three-fourths of the students indicated that they liked school; 89% agreed that they liked their classes, 75% said school was fun, while 27% said they did not look forward to going to school.

Student-teacher relationships (items 13-22). Ninety percent of the respondents felt that their teachers understood them, were fair to them, liked them, and showed an interest in them. The majority of the students also felt a personal relationship with their teachers: 65% said that they would feel comfortable sharing

Table 1

Attitudes Toward School Expressed by Students
Attending Three Alternative Schools in May 1975

Item	Response	School A[a] N=28	School B N=37	School C N=39	Total N=124
Curriculum Relevance					
1. This school teaches me the things I want to learn	SA[b]	18%	35%	12%	20%
	A	71	65	70	69
	D	4	0	11	6
	SD	7	0	7	5
2. School doesn't teach the more important things in life	SA	4	3	5	4
	A	7	5	27	16
	D	63	32	55	50
	SD	26	59	13	30
3. The work I do in school is not worthwhile	SA	4	0	4	3
	A	4	3	19	11
	D	52	42	65	55
	SD	41	56	12	32
4. Most schoolwork will be useful to me when I get out of school	SA	26	27	20	24
	A	59	68	59	62
	D	7	3	20	12
	SD	7	3	0	3
5. Classes in this school do not apply to the world I know	SA	11%	0%	7%	6%
	A	7	8	11	9
	D	67	41	76	63
	SD	15	51	5	22
6. I am learning a lot of things that will help me to earn a living	SA	18	14	8	12
	A	64	53	50	54
	D	11	31	35	28
	SD	7	3	8	6
General Liking of School					
7. I like school	SA	21%	43%	7%	21%
	A	57	51	57	55
	D	7	5	29	17
	SD	14	0	7	7
8. My classes are boring	SA	0	0	4	2
	A	11	3	19	12
	D	63	73	74	71
	SD	26	24	4	15
9. I think school is fun	SA	15	30	12	18
	A	59	70	47	57
	D	19	0	32	19
	SD	7	0	9	6
10. My classes are a challenging experience	SA	19	14	5	11
	A	48	58	58	60
	D	22	25	33	28
	SD	11	3	4	5
11. I like my classes	SA	32%	16%	7%	16%
	A	54	81	78	73
	D	11	3	15	10
	SD	4	0	0	1
12. I don't look forward to going to school	SA	4	0	4	3
	A	18	6	39	24
	D	57	53	39	48
	SD	21	42	18	26
Student–Teacher Relationships					
13. My teachers are not honest in their dealings with me	SA	0%	5%	4%	3%
	A	4	3	11	7
	D	50	16	72	50
	SD	46	76	13	40
14. I think my teachers understand me	SA	31	26	7	18
	A	69	71	73	72
	D	0	3	16	9
	SD	0	0	4	2
15. I would feel comfortable sharing personal concerns with my teachers	SA	21	35	5	18
	A	43	57	42	47
	D	25	8	42	28
	SD	11	0	11	8
16. It is hard for me to know what my teachers are really like as persons	SA	4	0	3	2
	A	21	3	26	18
	D	46	43	60	52
	SD	29	54	10	28
17. My teachers show an interest in me	SA	33	27	7	19
	A	67	70	78	73
	D	0	3	16	8
	SD	0	0	0	0
18. My teachers are fair in their dealing with me	SA	33	19	7	17
	A	63	75	77	73
	D	0	0	14	7
	SD	4	6	2	3
19. Most of my teachers seem to like me	SA	37	31	11	23
	A	59	64	82	72
	D	0	6	7	5
	SD	4	0	0	1
20. My teachers do not listen to what I have to say	SA	0	0	0	0
	A	0	0	15	7
	D	64	51	74	65
	SD	36	49	11	29

[a]School A, The City; School B, Loring-Nicollet; School C, Northside Street Academy.

[b]SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 (continued) School Attitudes of Alternative School Students

Item	Response	School A	School B	School C	Total
21. I like most of my teachers	SA	43%	59%	20%	37%
	A	54	41	71	58
	D	4	0	9	5
	SD	0	0	0	0
22. Most of my teachers are not considerate of how students feel	SA	7	0	0	2
	A	7	3	19	11
	D	54	59	69	62
	SD	32	38	13	25
Instructional Quality					
23. Teachers at this school really seem to enjoy teaching	SA	58%	46%	23%	38%
	A	38	54	70	58
	D	4	0	7	4
	SD	0	0	0	0
24. Teachers in this school do a poor job	SA	4	0	2	2
	A	0	3	9	5
	D	25	8	62	37
	SD	71	89	27	57
25. I can get help from my teachers with my school work	SA	59	32	5	26
	A	37	59	79	64
	D	0	5	9	6
	SD	4	3	7	5
26. My teachers give me enough background and information to complete my school work	SA	30	19	4	14
	A	63	75	77	73
	D	4	6	16	10
	SD	4	0	4	3
27. Many times I am not clear about what the teacher expects me to do	SA	4	3	2	2
	A	21	24	53	37
	D	64	62	42	53
	SD	11	11	4	7
Student Input					
28. I have some power in deciding how the school is run	SA	25%	24%	4%	15%
	A	46	65	59	58
	D	25	11	27	21
	SD	4	0	11	6
29. I have little to say about the classes offered	SA	7	0	4	3
	A	11	8	25	17
	D	56	59	59	58
	SD	26	32	13	22
30. My teachers are not willing to listen to suggestions from students	SA	7	0	0	2
	A	7	0	18	10
	D	52	51	64	58
	SD	33	49	18	31
31. Many times students are given a chance to decide what their class does	SA	39	19	7	18
	A	54	70	77	69
	D	4	8	13	9
	SD	4	3	4	3
Individual Freedom and Responsibility					
32. I feel that I have too much responsibility as a student	SA	0%	0%	3%	2%
	S	4	5	8	6
	D	71	65	75	71
	SD	25	30	14	21
33. Someone is always breathing down my neck in this school	SA	12	0	4	4
	A	15	0	13	9
	D	50	62	69	63
	SD	23	38	15	24
34. I cannot make a decision about my work activities without my teacher's approval	SA	11	3	2	4
	A	7	3	36	19
	D	63	68	54	60
	SD	19	27	9	17
35. I have a lot of freedom to choose what I want to study	SA	18	27	13	18
	A	75	62	68	68
	D	7	11	18	13
	SD	0	0	2	1
36. This school allows me to work at my own speed	SA	57	30	16	30
	A	39	62	76	63
	D	0	8	7	6
	SD	4	0	0	1
Individuality of Learning Experiences					
37. I can usually shape my classes to my own style of doing things	SA	15%	22%	5%	12%
	A	78	70	61	68
	D	7	8	30	18
	SD	0	0	4	2
38. There is little room to express myself in the work I do	SA	7	0	4	3
	A	19	3	19	14
	D	59	38	65	55
	SD	15	59	12	27
39. This school gives me a chance to develop my special skills and talents	SA	21	16	7	13
	A	64	73	64	67
	D	14	11	23	17
	SD	0	0	5	2
Peer Relationships					
40. I have some good friends in school	SA	37%	68%	23%	40%
	A	56	30	56	48
	D	7	3	18	11
	SD	0	0	4	2
41. Some students in this school are not considerate of my feelings	SA	7	3	4	4
	A	30	32	57	43
	D	48	51	37	44
	SD	15	14	2	8
42. Students in this school seem to like me	SA	19	17	6	12
	A	77	81	88	83
	D	0	3	6	4
	SD	4	0	0	1

Table 1 (continued) School Attitudes of Alternative School Students

Item	Response	School A	School B	School C	Total
43. Some students in this school are sarcastic and critical of other students	SA	7%	6%	4%	5
	A	33	64	63	56
	D	48	25	30	32
	SD	11	6	4	6
44. Students in this school listen to one another	SA	26	22	6	15
	A	63	76	65	68
	D	7	3	26	14
	SD	4	0	4	3
45. I feel uncomfortable in this school	SA	11	5	5	7
	A	14	5	17	13
	D	43	38	57	48
	SD	32	51	21	33
46. Students in this school are not very friendly	SA	0	0	4	2
	A	4	3	14	8
	D	54	36	63	53
	SD	43	61	20	38
47. Students in this school are not honest with each other	SA	14	0	6	6
	A	11	22	30	23
	D	57	51	60	57
	SD	18	27	4	14
48. Students in this school share their feelings with one another	SA	18	32	2	15
	A	68	65	45	57
	D	14	3	49	27
	SD	0	0	4	2
49. I would feel comfortable sharing my personal concerns with other students in this school	SA	11	28	2	12
	A	54	64	40	50
	D	32	8	47	32
	SD	4	0	11	6
General Progress in Learning					
50. I don't think I am learning much in this school	SA	0%	0%	4%	2%
	A	7	3	20	12
	D	59	41	55	51
	SD	33	57	22	35
51. I am satisfied with how much I am learning	SA	32	11	5	13
	A	54	67	53	57
	D	7	19	35	24
	SD	7	3	7	6
52. I feel that I'm doing enough as a student.	SA	25	11	4	11
	A	61	51	54	55
	D	11	32	39	31
	SD	4	5	4	4
53. I think I learned more this year than in previous years	SA	30	43	8	24
	A	52	49	43	47
	D	19	8	37	23
	SD	0	0	12	5

Item	Response	School A	School B	School C	Total
More Specific Progress in Learning					
Indicate how much school has helped you in each of the following areas.					
54. Improving my reading skills	A Lot	44%	32%	16%	28%
	Some	44	41	70	55
	Little or None	11	27	14	18
55. Improving my math skills	A Lot	56	27	18	29
	Some	33	35	57	45
	Little or None	11	38	25	26
56. Improving my understanding of myself	A Lot	41	72	27	44
	Some	48	28	55	45
	Little or None	11	0	18	11
57. Learning about different careers and jobs	A Lot	41	16	20	24
	Some	48	57	49	51
	Little or None	11	27	31	25
58. Learning how to get along with other people	A Lot	56	78	27	49
	Some	37	22	52	38
	Little or None	7	0	21	12
59. Learning how to communicate with other people	A Lot	48	78	30	50
	Some	44	22	58	44
	Little or None	7	0	11	7
60. Becoming aware of what I want to do after I leave this school	A Lot	26	49	27	33
	Some	59	46	52	52
	Little or None	15	5	21	15
61. Improving my writing skills	A Lot	19	24	20	21
	Some	70	57	55	59
	Little or None	11	19	25	20
62. Becoming more responsible for my behavior	A Lot	56	70	29	48
	Some	30	27	59	43
	Little or None	15	3	13	10
63. Developing skills that will be useful for different jobs	A Lot	33	14	25	24
	Some	59	58	46	53
	Little or None	7	28	29	24
64. Improving my self-confidence	A Lot	48	59	22	40
	Some	41	41	62	50
	Little or None	11	0	16	10
65. Keeping an open mind & being independent of the opinions of other students	A Lot	37	70	23	41
	Some	52	27	60	48
	Little or None	11	3	17	11
66. Improving my ability to make decisions	A Lot	59	73	31	51
	Some	30	27	44	36
	Little or None	11	0	24	14

personal concerns with their teachers, and 80% reported that it was not hard to know what their teachers were really like as persons. The students at school B (Loring-Nicollet) had particularly favorable views of student-teacher relationships.

Instructional quality (items 23-27). The quality of instruction at the alternative schools received very favorable ratings by the students. More than ninety percent of the students said that the teachers really seemed to enjoy teaching, that the students could get help from their teachers with their schoolwork, and that the teachers did not do a poor job. However, 39% of the students indicated that many times they were not clear about what the teacher expected them to do. This lack of clear expections was reported by 55% of the students at the Northside Street Academy (school C).

Student input and responsibility (items 28-36). Eighty-to-ninety percent of the students said that students were given input into their classes, that teachers were willing to listen to their suggestions, that students had a lot of freedom to choose what they wanted to study, and that school allowed them to work at their own speed. About three-fourths of the students said that they had some power in deciding how the school was run.

Individuality of learning experiences (items 37-39). A large majority of the respondents (about 80%) indicated that they could usually shape their classes to their own style of doing things and that their school gave them a chance to express themselves.

Peer relationships (items 40-49). In general, students reported positive relationships among the students attending alternative schools. About 90% of the respondents agreed that students in their school seemed to like them, agreed that students listened to one another, and disagreed that students were not very friendly. More students at schools A and B, than students at school C, indicated that they related to each other on a personal level. About 90% of the students at schools A and B, compared with 50% of the students at school C, said that students in their school shared their feelings with one another. In fact, 92% of the students at school B reported that they would feel comfortable sharing personal concerns with students in their school.

General progress in learning (items 50-53). The majority of the alternative school students were, in general, satisfied with how much they were learning and said that they thought they learned more this year than in previous years. Students at school C did not respond as positively as did students at schools A and B.

More specific progress in learning (items 54-66). Did the alternative school students think their school helped them improve their academic, job-oriented skills? Roughly one-fourth of students said their school helped "a lot" and half said their school helped "some" in the following areas: improving reading, math, and writing skills; developing skills useful in different jobs; increasing awareness of different careers and what they want to do after they leave school.

About 40-50% of the students said their alternative school helped them "a lot" and another 40-50% said their school helped them "some" in non-academic, personal-development areas: learning to communicate with and get along with other people; improving self-confidence and self-understanding; improving decision-making ability. Alternative school B, compared with schools A and C, received particularly favorable ratings by its students in the non-academic, personal-development areas.

Differences among alternative schools. There were some differences among student attitudes at the three alternative schools participating in this study. Some of the differences among schools may be due to the different return rates at each school. The greatest differences were between the Northside Street Academy and the other two schools. Although the responses of the Northside Street Academy were positive, they were not as positive as the responses of students at The City and Loring-Nicollet. The differences were particularly evident on the items measuring personal teacher-student relationships and perceived progress in non-academic, personal development.

Public School Students' Attitudes Toward School

Do students who attend public secondary schools feel differently about school than do students attending alternative schools? Several of the items on the survey given to alternative school students were taken from the Student Opinion Questionnaire, which was completed in May 1972 by three-fourths of the students in Minneapolis senior high schools (Johnson and Faunce, 1972b). Table 2 on page 8 shows the percentage of students in the alternative and public schools who either strongly agreed or agreed to the items that were common to both questionnaires.

The alternative school students responded more favorably than did the public school students on all items. Some of the differences were very large. Fourteen percent of the alternative students, compared with 60% of the public-school students, agreed that their classes were boring. Eighty-nine percent of the students attending the alternative schools felt that their school taught them the things

Table 2

A Comparison of Attitudes Toward School Expressed by Students Attending Three Alternative Schools in May 1975 and Minneapolis Senior High Students in May 1972 (Percent Who Strongly Agreed or Agreed to Each Item)

Questionnaire Item[a]	Alternative Schools May 1975 N=124	Public Schools May 1972 N=9307[b]
General Liking of School		
I like School	76%	60%
My classes are boring	14	60
I think school is fun	75	47
I like my classes	89	58
I don't look forward to going to school	27	48
Curriculum Relevance		
This school teaches me the things I want to learn	89%	41%
Most school work will be useful to me when I get out of school	86	48
I (think I) am learning a lot of things that will help me earn a living (when I get older)	66	50
Student-Teacher Relationships		
I think my teachers understand me	90%	51%
Most of my teachers seem to like me	95	85
I like most of my teachers	95	78
Most of my teachers are not considerate of how students feel	13	43
Instructional Quality		
Teachers at this school really seem to enjoy teaching	96%	60%
Teachers in this school do a poor job	7	28
Student Input		
Many times students are given a chance to decide what their class does	87%	47%
General Progress in Learning		
I don't think I am learning much in this school	14%	39%
I think I learned more this year than in previous years	71	48

[a]Some items on the attitude survey given to alternative schools students were similar to items on the Student Opinion Questionnaire (SOQ) given to Minneapolis senior high students in May 1972. Words in parentheses were included in the SOQ items but not in the alternative schools survey.

[b]Three-fourths of the Minneapolis public school students in grades 10-12 (N=9,307) completed the SOQ in May 1972.

they wanted to learn; 41% of the students in public schools agreed with this statement.

At least two factors may be operating to make the differences between the school-related attitudes of alternative and public school students in Table 8 greater than they really are. The attitudes of Minneapolis senior high students may be more positive in 1975 than in 1972. Although the Student Opinion Questionnaire has not been given to senior high students since May 1972, the attitudes of ninth graders in Minneapolis have shown an increase of 5-10 percentage points from May 1972 to May 1975 on items in the following areas: general liking of school and curriculum relevance.

Second, the public schools' Student Opinion Questionnaire was completed anonymously by the respondents. The questionnaires for the alternative school students were identified by individual code numbers. However, the respondents were informed that the code numbers would be used for research purposes only, and that staff members would not associate names with responses.

On the other hand, the differences have possibly greater significance if one considers that many of the students attending the alternative schools were low achievers in the public schools. In a previous study (Johnson and Faunce, 1973), public schools students who said that they received below average grades had substantially poorer attitudes toward school than did students who said that they received average and above grades.

Discussion

The evidence is mounting that secondary students attending the Federation of Alternative Schools have positive attitudes toward their school. Some evidence also exists that indicates that the school-related attitudes of alternative school students are more positive than attitudes of students attending public senior high schools in Minneapolis. To some readers, this information may seem insignificant. After all, most, if not all, of the alternative school students voluntarily chose to leave the public schools and to attend the Federation of Alternative Schools. It seems reasonable that they would choose a school that they liked. It is undoubtedly true that students will choose to attend the school they like best. But it also seems significant that the Federation of Alternative Schools have not only offered a choice, but have developed school settings about which the students have good feelings.

Student attitudes toward their school are important. But they are not the only measure of a school's success. Do the alternative schools have an impact on their students' feelings about themselves? Do they have an impact on their students' academic skills? What affect do alternative schools have on their students' eventual success in (and satisfaction with) the adult world? What are the attendance and dropout rates? How many students achieve the other affective and cognitive objectives set by the alternative schools? These questions have not been adequately answered for the Federation of Alternative Schools.

Before any conclusions can be made about the effectiveness of alternative schools, further research is necessary. However, if positive attitudes are a means to the end, alternative schools appear to have some potential for effecting the attainment of these, and other, educational outcomes.

Johnson, Lary and Faunce, R. W. "Alternative Schools Outside the Public School System in Minneapolis 1971: A Description of Secondary School Students Who Attended Them." Minneapolis Public Schools, 1972a.

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